

6 phases of the 2020 Democratic nomination race

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We are headed into a Democratic presidential primary contest that will look dramatically different than anything we've seen in our lifetime. By March 17th we will know if a candidate will be able to secure enough delegates to lock up the nomination or whether Democrats will be headed to their first open convention since 1952.

While the primary calendar has not been finalized, largely due to a record number of candidates and changes in the party rules and primary calendar, there is a very good chance that none of the candidates will have secured enough delegates to lock down the Democratic nomination for President after the final primary is held in early June.

The upcoming nomination process will play out in six distinct phases:

Phase 1: The Presidential Debates. There are 12 Democratic candidate debates scheduled - with half taking place this year. Given the large field, the debates will be spread out over two consecutive days, with the candidates drawing lots to determine which night they will participate.

The debate cycle of the campaign can be broken up into three distinct periods. The initial phase will take place this summer when debates will occur in Miami on June 26th-27th, followed by two days in Detroit on July 30th-31st. At this point 17 announced candidates have qualified to participate in the first debate.

By the end of the summer these early debates should help begin the process of sorting out – and thinning out - the field into tiers. The candidates who are able to stand out in these debates will be in a good position to raise money, which will enable them to begin separating themselves from the rest of the pack.

There will be a second round of four debates in the fall, which should further solidify the field into tiers, with more candidates dropping out as we head toward the end of the year.

In January and February there will be four debates in the early voting states of Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina. At this point the field should

have narrowed enough that all the remaining candidates can appear on the same stage for these debates.

Phase 2: The Four Early Voting States. The second phase of the campaign will begin in February when the voters begin to cast ballots. During this period establishing momentum (and raising real money) by winning or doing well in the four early states of Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina will be critical. Building this momentum will have more of an impact than winning the 193 delegates at stake this month. More candidates will end their campaigns during this initial round of voting.

Phase 3: Super Tuesday. On this pivotal day at least 14 states, including California, Texas, Georgia, Virginia, North Carolina and Massachusetts, will hold contests. This is the single most important day of the nomination fight when over 41% of the total delegates will be selected.

After Super Tuesday we can expect a clear front-runner for the nomination. Going forward the delegate count will be the only metric that matters. A candidate's electability over Trump will become more of the focus as the field continues to winnow down to a handful of legitimate candidates.

Phase 4: The Tipping Point Period. There are 12 states voting in this phase, with 1,168 delegates at stake during the remainder of March. The key states of Michigan, Ohio, Missouri and Washington are voting on March 10th followed by Arizona, Florida and Illinois on March 17th.

With over 67% of the delegates selected at this point, we will likely know whether any candidate will be able to secure enough delegates necessary to avoid a brokered convention in Milwaukee.

Phase 5: The Final Round of Primaries. From April to early June 18 states, Puerto Rico and Washington, DC are scheduled to hold primaries to determine the allocation of the remaining 1,373 delegates.

Phase 6: Post-Primary/Pre-Convention. Rather than marking the end of the nomination process, if at the end of the primary voting none of the candidates has the 2,382 delegates necessary to secure the Democratic nomination for President, the five-week period between the last primary and the convention could be determinative in the selection of the Democratic nominee for President. Under this scenario, the leader in the nomination fight will need to cut deals with other

candidates in order to cobble together enough delegates to avoid the first open convention for the Democrats in almost 70 years.

By the end of March we will know if Democratic primary voters have determined the path they want to take to defeat Donald Trump next November. If the nomination hasn't been secured by that point we can expect a wild 100 days as Democrats try to sort out which candidate best represents the party's values and has the ability to defeat Donald Trump in the general election.